From federation to party?

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Published in:
50 Years European Parliament

ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΑ ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΟΥ

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Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινοβούλιο **Εμπειρία & Προοπτικές**

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Σχεδιασμός εξωφύλλου-Σελιδοποίηση/Graphic design
Περιγραφή/Perigrafi

Παραγωγή/Production
Χρήστος Κοσσίδας/Christos Kossidas

Εκτύπωση/Printing
Technograph A.E.

για τον Κοινοβουλευτισμό και τη Δημοκρατία
Βασ. Σοφίας 11 106 71 Αθήνα • τηλ.: 210-36.92.272 • fax: 210-36.92.180
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ISBN: 978-960-6757-19-8

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FROM FEDERATION TO PARTY? THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

"Political parties at the European level are important as a factor for integration within the Union. They contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union." The position of political parties within the European political process was officially laid down for the first time in the Treaty of Maastricht in 1991. Leaving the curious normative wording of this article apart – suggesting that these European parties were expected to contribute to the formation of a positive European awareness only – we will focus on the other parts of the Treaty article: with "parties at the European level" and with the second task formally assigned to them since the Treaty of Maastricht – namely, expressing the political will of voters in the representative democracy that the European Union seeks to be.

In this contribution two questions will be addressed. Firstly, is it possible to speak of parties at the European level in the same way that we do of parties within national political systems? And secondly, how have these parties interpreted the representative role that they are expected to perform? First I will explain what I understand by Eurofederations and their representative function. I will then outline the organizational evolution of the federations from their origins in the mid-1970's up to the present day, and will show how their role has evolved. After that I'll take stock and draw some conclusions. It will come as no surprise that the 'parties at the European level' are sui generis parties that differ markedly in some respects from parties at the national level. We see this for instance in their limited capacity to carry out their representative task as it has been formally defined. And finally, I will address the question of what we can attribute these deficiencies to, and how improvements could be made.

1. Eurofederations and their representative function

A Eurofederation (or Europarty) in effect brings together an ideological family of parties at the European level. It is not a homogenous organization, but a reticular conglomerate of three structures: national member parties, the parliamentary group within the European Parliament and the transnational, extra-parliamentary party organization, or to use the terms of political scientists Katz and Mair, the 'party on the ground', the 'party in public office' and the 'party in central office'.[1] The national parties are the 'parties on the ground' linking the federation to society. The Eurogroup is the party 'in public office', representing the federation in the European Parliament. The party 'in central office' is the transnational party organization, the federation, which – like the group – is primarily active at the European level. The federation overarches national member parties and the parliamentary group, and it points out the political direction – at least in theory.

Over the years relationships between these different structures have certainly not always been stable and harmonious, and this is not very different today. In order to indicate the degree of integration of the different components one could use the scale developed by the German political scientist Niedermayer. He distinguished basically three stages. At the first stage, national parties maintained merely ad hoc contacts with parties in other countries. In the second stage, the co-operative stage, the cross-national relations are embedded in a permanent trans-national organisational structure. In the third stage, the transnational organisation has evolved into a supranational organisation which restricts the the autonomy of the national organisations.[2]

The parties on the ground, in public office and in central office each contribute in their own way to the federation's representative function. Here we will focus on the transnational party organization. Although this has a degree of independent authority thanks to the partial transfer of sovereignty from member parties to the transnational level, it cannot develop fully because of the lack of co-operation from the same national parties.

There are different ways of interpreting the representative function of political parties. Some scholars confine it to the party's programme function – in other words, the articulation and aggregation of voter preferences. Once these views have been selected and prioritized, the party incorporates them into its election programme, which then serves as the basis for the line-up of the par-

liamentary group and members of the government – if there are any. In this way, the preferences of the voters are brought into the political decision making process. But we can also interpret the party's representative role more broadly than simply structuring the substance of voter choice. It then includes activities related to its programmatic function, such as running election campaigns and recruiting candidates to expound or implement the party's position. Here is chosen for the broader interpretation, which means, in addition to channelling and combining voter preferences, also the recruitment and selection of political personnel, the mobilization of voters and the shaping of policy. In brief, it refers to the linkage function of parties, as intermediaries between state and society.

I. Prelude – The Formation of Parliamentary Groups (1950's)

Political parties largely evolve in response to changes in their institutional environment. For example, the evolution of parliaments that controlled government brought with it the formation of groups, and extending suffrage went hand in hand with the rise of mass parties. This somewhat simplified institutional mechanism also occurred at the European level. The process of European integration dates back to the early 1950's. In May 1950 Schuman proposed the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, France and Germany became signatories one year later, and in July 1952 the treaty came into effect. The 'Common Assembly' held its inaugural session in Strasbourg in September. This parliament was charged with the political supervising of the executive body of the ECSC, called the High Authority, and could force resignations where necessary. Although the Common Assembly was composed on a national basis (the parliaments of member states appointed representatives annually), ideological affinities proved stronger than national origins. Socialist, Christian Democrat and liberal groups quickly formed, and were granted formal recognition in June 1953, which entailed financial support to establish a permanent secretariat, to convene meetings or to call in expert advice. They retained their legal status and material assistance in the European Parliament, as the Common Assembly has been called since 1958, following the Treaties of Rome in March 1957, establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), beside ECSC. In fact, their position was made even stronger: "all three of them enlarged their Bureau, developed their

administrative organisation further and intensified their political activity".[3]

The Socialists – one of the most internationalistic inclined of all political families – were the first to start some kind of European transnational cooperation. Not long after the establishment of the ECSC in 1951, the Socialist Party Federation was founded. Socialist delegates from the six ECSC countries formed the 'Socialist Group' within the Common Assembly, with its own coordinating bureau and permanent secretariat. In the run-up to the establishment of the EEC and Euratom, the parties decided in 1957 to set up the Liaison Bureau of the Socialist Parties of the European Community. Each party was represented in the Bureau, which met several times each year. One of its functions was to draw up recommendations and to keep affiliated parties informed about its work.[4] It also convened a congress every two years, attended by party representatives and members of the Socialist Group and the liaison bureau. These regular, institutionalized meetings of MPs and party representatives were intended in principle to promote the exchange of information and to coordinate socialist policies.[5] Despite an energetic start, little came of this, however. And there were no majority decisions, since national parties were unwilling to relinquish any of their power.

II. The Prospect of European Elections and the Emergence of Party Political Federations (1970's)

Thus parliamentary groups preceded parties at European level. It was believed that the process of party formation would not really get underway until the European Parliament was directly elected by voters in the member states. The ECSC treaty already opened the door for members of the Common Assembly to be elected "by direct universal suffrage". The Treaties of Rome allowed the Parliament itself to draw up "a uniform procedure for all member states" for direct elections, although no timetable was set for doing so. Little came of this as a result of inactivity or direct opposition from national governments. In the 1960's, European integration had reached an impasse, partly as a result of French president De Gaulle's veto of the United Kingdom's application to join the European communities, the extension of the powers of the European Parliament, and the introduction of qualified majority voting (QMV) to take decisions. All this meant that there was little incentive for national parties to work towards closer cooperation.

Things changed after De Gaulle's departure in 1969. The European summit of heads of state and government in The Hague in December of that year produced a breakthrough: they not only opened the door once more for enlargement, but also sought to increase the powers of the European Parliament and to examine the modalities of direct European elections. In the early 1970's, this new impetus led to increased interest among national parties in transnational cooperation. In December 1974 the Paris summit resolved to hold direct elections at the end of the decade, a decision that gave individual European party associations *in statu nascendi* a powerful incentive to join forces more closely – they would have to mobilize European voters and to act as a link between the European electorate and European political institutions. Some had very high expectations of the impact of direct European elections, like David Marquand, a former British MP for Labour: "The Community's chances of moving beyond the narrow limits of the present '*Europe des patries*' depend crucially on the emergence of a new kind of '*Europe des partis*', in which the political forces that matter at the national level are bound together by the need to fight for power at the Community level. At present, such a Europe exists only in embryo, but no one who has watched the preparations now being made for direct elections can doubt that they will help considerably to hasten the moment of its birth".[6]

SOCIALISTS

With the prospect of direct European elections, the establishment of the Confederation of Socialist Parties of the European Community (CSPEC) in April 1974 marked a new phase in the process of federalizing the Socialists. Although little changed in an organizational sense, the affiliated parties lost something of their formal autonomy in the new structure, as both the Bureau and the Congress were now able to adopt majority decisions under certain conditions. In practice, however, parties could choose to 'opt out' if they felt that their interests were harmed. Hix and Lesse are of the view that the Confederation was by no means a supranational party.[7] That had been made very clear in discussions about the name of the organization: whereas Dutch Socialists argued for 'federation', their British counterparts would go no further than 'confederation'. These differences reflected the divergent positions on the question of European integration. Such internal division also threatened to jeopardize the drafting of a joint programme for the European elections of 1979. However, the pro-

gramme was salvaged by party leaders at their Confederation summit held in Brussels in June 1978. With an eye to the elections, the leaders decided on a rather vague 'political declaration' and an 'appeal to the voter', and national parties were granted the freedom to come up with their own programmes. This intervention was an important precedent that "began the institutionalisation of the socialist leaders' summits as the main decision-making body in the Confederation".[8]

The first direct European elections had exposed the failure of the Confederation: too many member parties had been engaging in national campaigns with national themes. It also became clear that the growing independence of the Socialist party group in the European Parliament required counterbalancing. This led to a small-scale reorganization. Ties with the Euro-group were strengthened and the annual conference of party leaders was institutionalized. Later it was decided that it would be held twice a year, immediately preceding the European Council for Heads of State and Government. It was also laid down by statute that the Confederation was to coordinate the position of the national parties, which was a minor move towards supranationalism. At the same time, the congress confirmed that the Confederation did not intend to grow into a 'European super-party' in which the member parties would have to surrender part of their autonomy.

CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS

All in all the socialists had shown themselves to be more energetic than their liberal and Christian Democratic rivals, who had difficulties getting federation-based cooperation off the ground. In 1965, the loose alliance the Christian Democrats had formed was transformed into the European Union of Christian Democrats (EUCD).[9] In 1970 the EUCD and the European Parliament Christian Democratic Group moved to set up a so-called Standing Conference of the Six, which would act as a liaison body between the chairs of the Christian Democrat parties of the European Communities (EC) countries, their national parliamentary parties and their Members of European Parliament (MEPs). Now federalization also started gaining momentum among Christian Democrats. In 1972 this body became the Political Committee of the Christian Democratic parties in the EC – the linchpin in the creation of a European party.[10] Two years later the Bureau of the EUCD began actual preparations for establishing a tran-

snational organization. However, there were major differences of opinion about fundamentals and the composition of the federation. With the aim of securing the key position for Christian Democrats in the European Parliament, the German CDU and CSU wanted as broad as possible a coalition of Christian Democrats and conservatives. Most other parties, however, wanted a purely Christian Democratic federation – and hence the exclusion of non-Christian, secular parties. The programmatic purists won the day, but lost the battle for the name of the federation. Under pressure from the Germans, they opted for the neutral label of European People's Party (EPP), which would make a broader composition possible in the longer term. Although the party's subtitle – Federation of Christian Democratic Parties of the European Community – might well have been an identity marker, it fell quickly into disuse.

The EPP was founded on 8 July 1976. The word 'party' showed its supranational aspirations, but according to Pridham this was initially by no means the case.[11] In its statutes the EPP affirmed a federal internal structure. Its political bureau and biennial congress were able to take majority decisions, and election programmes established in this way were binding on the national parties.[12] In 1983, after Kohl took office as German Chancellor, the EPP began convening conferences of the leaders of the Christian Democrat party and government in preparation for meetings of the European Council. This body gradually grew in importance as it went along, leading – according to observers – to an "erosion of the democratic decision-making process and a clouding of the political debate by national interests".[13]

Despite apparent supranational and centralist tendencies, the national parties would have largely retained their independence as the EPP's statutes recognized "their identity and their freedom of action within the framework of their national responsibilities".[14] According to Swedish political scientist Johansson, "it is still national politicians and parties that have the final say on EPP programs and positions".[15] The EPP leadership took this into account by seeking consensus wherever possible rather than by settling every issue by majority decision. For this reason, the British political scientist Hanley saw the EPP as an organization that brought the national parties together in a loose coalition. "Co-ordination is a more useful concept for understanding the EPP than supra-nationalism. It seems to us idle to refer to the EPP as a 'superparty' on transnational lines".[16]

The EPP was the underdog in the relationship with the Christian Democratic group in the European Parliament. Firstly, it depended on them not only finan-

cially, but also in terms of personnel. Furthermore, the Christian Democratic MEPs were quite well represented in EPP bodies, including in its political bureau.[17] Moreover, because most member parties did not normally send their key politicians as representatives to the EPP executive, they remained in the shadow of the MEPs.

LIBERALS

In the early 1970's, Liberal International (set up in 1947), consisting predominantly of European parties, endeavoured to promote cooperation and communication between the liberal parties of the EC nations. However, the idea of creating a permanent regional federative organization under the umbrella of the International was soon abandoned. In 1973 liberal party leaders decided to set up a separate European association of their parties. They played a major role in the process of federalization, becoming – in Hrbek's view – "the driving force towards the establishment of a transnational party organisation".[18] The Federation of Liberal and Democratic Parties of the European Community (abbreviated to ELD) was launched in March 1976. The word 'Democrats' had been added because not all affiliated parties wished to call themselves liberals.[19] In 1986, after a few parties from Mediterranean countries had joined, the ELD changed its name to Federation of European Liberal, Democratic and Reform Parties (ELDR). From the outset, the Federation's internal cohesion suffered as a result of its broad political heterogeneity, with some affiliated parties positioned in the political centre, and others further to the right – and sometimes belonging to the same country.

The Liberal Group within the European Parliament played a fairly minor role in establishing the ELD, partly because of its long history of internal political diversity. In a financial and organizational sense, however, it was central to the expansion of the liberal federation.[20] That relationship of dependence also prevented the ELD from shaping the political position of the Liberal Group, as had originally been intended, yet not formalized in the statutes. In practice, however, the MEPs held the upper hand.[21]

Although the term 'federation' – as opposed to 'party' – was explicitly chosen when the ELD was founded, its statutes, congress and executive committee were empowered to adopt (qualified) majority decisions (of two-thirds of the vote).[22] In a formal sense this to some extent curtailed the autonomy of the affiliated

parties, and "there are often cases where a party finds itself in a minority position and outvoted". In practice, the affiliated parties, all of which set great store by their independence, usually tried to reach consensus.[23] The ELD also had supranational powers in other areas. For example, it was supposed to approve the national candidate lists for the European elections (although this never in fact happened).[24] The ELD parties were also obliged to work with the jointly drafted programme during the campaign for these elections.

CONSERVATIVES AND REGIONALISTS

In addition to these federations, several others emerged, although surprisingly not involving the communists, in many respects perhaps the most internationally oriented of parties. Ideological disagreement relating to 'Eurocommunism' stood in the way of close cooperation between the French and Italian communist parties – the largest in Western Europe. The conservatives, on the other hand, who had never favoured international party structures of a cooperative kind, did manage to create their own association. In April 1978, almost two years after the creation of the EPP, the European Democratic Union (EDU) was established, involving even a few Christian Democratic parties. The genesis of the EDU ran parallel to that of the EPP.[25] The German and Austrian Christian Democrats and the British Conservatives were the driving force behind it. The latter hoped that the EDU would help them to break out of their isolation in the European Parliament. The other parties that made up the EPP, which saw the EDU primarily as a rival organization, were in general not amused. The EDU was no more than a rather loose coalition of parties (some from outside the EC): the British Conservatives' antipathy to any kind of supranational organization, for example, precluded any closer association. For this reason, nothing came of a joint programme in the 1979 European elections.

For nationalist and regional parties too, international cooperation does not seem to be the obvious step. Nevertheless, with an eye to the European elections, they too joined forces. The disappointing results led to the formation of the relatively loose organised 'European Free Alliance' (EFA) in 1981. Unlike other federations, they could not fall back on the support of a strong, like-minded parliamentary group. The chief objective of the parties affiliated to the EFA is full or partial autonomy for their regions. The Federation was able to develop a common, though limited, platform for the European elections of 1984.

Together with the Greens, the EFA formed the Rainbow Group in the European Parliament from 1984 to 1989.[26]

GREENS

In the run-up to the 1979 elections, the Greens were barely able to organize any kind of cooperation. It took them until late 1980 before they proceeded to establish the 'Coordination of Green and Radical Parties in Europe', which also took on board parties that were not considered to be truly ecological. This inherent contradiction led to a rift. In the autumn of 1983, the European Green Coordination (EGC) was established, also called the European Greens. With its congress, executive board and unanimity rule in decision-making matters, the organizational model of the EGC was to a large degree similar to that of the other transnational federations, although it was more decentralized. In contrast with the other federations, in which the parliamentary group had an important role to play right from the party's establishment, the foundation of the EGC was also predicated on the wish to establish a common group in the European Parliament, which was also expected to raise revenues. Just like the other federations, the EGC did indeed receive organizational and, especially after 1989, substantial financial support from the EP-group. There was no talk of the party's political leadership of the groups. The EGC drafted programmes for the 1984 and 1989 elections, which were not taken very seriously by the party group or by the member parties. This changed after 1989, when the programme began to play a more directive role.[27]

BALANCE

The expectation that the first direct European elections in 1979 would see the genesis of a political arena at the European level, in which the federations would play a role that was clearly marked and recognizable to the electorate, failed to come true. "The EP elections were fought in the nation states, by the national parties, with national candidates and on national issues."[28] Voter turnout for the first European elections was low, and even lower for the next elections in 1984. Nor did these elections boost the development of the federations in a supranational direction. On the one hand, this had been due to the relative impotence of the European Parliament: it was generally felt that, if the federations

wanted to reinforce the strength of their positions, the competences of Parliament needed to be considerably enlarged. On the other hand, this stagnation was also related to the wide-ranging internal political diversity of the federations, despite the fact that within the European Uion they tied together parties from the same ideological family in a single organizational unit. The socialists had rather widely diverging views on European integration and, hence, on the degree to which their European federation had been organized supranationally. The Christian democrats had a fundamental difference of opinion about cooperation with the conservatives, and the liberals were divided not only on European integration but also on the degree to which the government could intervene in economic life.

This political heterogeneity, which had virtually found its symbolic expression in the quest for names when these three federations were established in the mid-1970's, was to persist into the next decade.[29] The joint election programmes in 1984 and 1989 which the federations had been able to draft, tended to be rather flat and non-committal for the sake of unity, which as a rule did not stop some member parties from distancing themselves from some items on the programme anyway. In addition to the joint manifesto, parties also commonly drafted an election programme of their own for their national grassroots.[30] In spite of all this, cohesion in the 1980's improved, more so in the EPP than among the socialists because the British and Danish member parties, then as now, did not care much for European integration.[31] Within the ELD, however, views grew even further apart, particularly on economic policies and nuclear armament.[32]

The federations' capacity for decisive action was held back not only by diverging political and ideological differences but also by their organisational waekness and their far-reaching dependence on the parliamentary groups for their funding, staffing and accommodation. The federations were largely bolstered by the Euro-groups' financial support. Federation staff were not uncommonly on the parliamentary groups' payroll, and virtually all of them were put up in European Parliament offices. Things being as they were, it was particularly difficult for the federation to guide – let alone manage – the parliamentary groups' work. MEPs tended to listen more to member parties or to the Eurogroup leadership than to the federation; after all, that was where they were dependent on for re-election and for their parliamentary career. The federations were also having considerable difficulty running the show because intensifying parliamentary duties meant that the group was more and more frequently expected

to produce points of view in a very short time on a wide array of – often entirely novel – issues. This often left the federation sidetracked.

In the terms of Niedermayer, in this period the federations were in the co-operative stage: through transnational co-operation the national parties hoped to enhance their influence at the European level. They performed some of the election-related functions, such as drafting joint election programmes and co-ordinating national election campaigns. Compared with political parties at a national level, their functions were very limited – for example, they had no say in the recruitment of candidates. As a result, their organizational structure was weak. 'Confederation' might have been a more appropriate name than 'federation'. Although a few formally took internal decisions based on some kind of majority voting, in practice decisions were taken mostly on the basis of unanimity, because most member parties were not prepared to relinquish any of their sovereignty.

III. Constitutionalization and Expansion (around 1990)

In the early 1990's the federations entered into a new phase, once again thanks to new opportunities arising out of growing widening and deepening of the European integration. On the one hand, the downfall of communism in Eastern Europe and the future membership of countries behind the former Iron Curtain opened up the possibility of many new member parties for the federations. European integration also intensified. From 1987 onwards, successive treaties had strengthened the supranational character of the EC, in particular because the European Council of Ministers could increasingly take decisions based on qualified majority voting and because the powers of the European Parliament were extended. This in turn made the federations stronger, as demonstrated by their formal recognition in the Treaty of Maastricht. At their insistence, and for the first time in a European treaty, a formal reference to the transnational European parties was included and their importance acknowledged (see the quotation at the beginning of this contribution). On the one hand, the federations needed to promote awareness within the Union (by bringing it closer to voters) and on the other to represent citizens in the European political arena. The clear assumption was that the federations would thereby strengthen the bond between citizens and the European Union, and hence increase the Union's legitimacy. Just how they should do so and by what means remained unclear;

nothing was said for instance about financial support for the European parties or their role in the European elections.[33] This recognition had no legal implications and was therefore primarily symbolic, but still a substantial step ahead.

The way in which the Europarties (as they will be called from now) had succeeded in including the article on the 'parties at the European level' within the Maastricht Treaty was illustrative for their attitude in the 1990's: more and more they became focussed on influencing the European polical agenda. In the main Europarties conferences of national party leaders (frequently also heads of government in the case of the christian democrats and social democrats), preceding the meetings of the European Council, were institutionalized. These conferences were also attended by the most prominent political associates within the EU institutions. The creation of this forum of national party leaders was linked to the restriction of the power of national veto within the European political process, which had increased the room for political manoeuvre.[34]

SOCIALISTS

In November 1993, the Confederation of Socialist Parties of the European Community was renamed Party of European Socialists (PES). This appeared to be taking the socialists down the road to supranational party formation: the principle of majority voting was introduced into those areas where it had also been applied by the European Council since the 1987 Single European Act. Its efficacy, however, was restricted immediately by allowing member parties recourse to a statutory opt-out clause. As a consequence, consensus-building remained the guiding principle within the PES.[35] In essence, the PES remained a 'party of parties', not in the least because the option of individual membership had been rejected in 1992, when the British Labour Party, among others, feared this would have negative consequences for the national party.

The PES made a particular effort to promote and harmonize member party collaboration. Party leader meetings, for instance, which had been customary for some time, were institutionalized, as were those of specialist ministers in 1996; working groups dealing with specific political themes were given greater prominence by bringing together experts from member states; and relations with fellow party members in other European bodies were strengthened. For example, meetings between socialist members of the European Commission and the PES parliamentary groups' leadership were formalized in 2001. Coope-

ration in matters of policymaking and programming was also intensified, with less of an exclusive focus on the European elections and greater consideration for the socialist contribution to Council meetings and inter-governmental conferences with a view to influencing the European agenda.[36]

In the late 1990's, the PES also undertook to improve its exposure to members of the various member parties and to consolidate its positioning within the member parties. The PES organized meetings in the member states, had its logo displayed on campaign materials and member party websites, and attempted to have the European alliance embedded in member party statutes. What also changed was the way in which member parties appointed their PES congress delegates. This used to be a task for the party leadership, but in 1997 the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) congress decided to elect part of the Dutch delegation to the PES congress, which would strengthen their mandate.[37] After 1999, the PES congress convened less frequently, which led to the introduction of a Council that met in between the congresses to chart the political course.

CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS

Just like the PES, the EPP also went through some organizational changes in the 1990's, aiming to improve mutual coordination and make decision-making more efficient. The most important innovation was the EPP summit, instituted in 1995. This body consisted of the EPP presidency, heads of government, party leaders in coalition governments, chairs and deputy chairs of the European Commission and (possibly) the European Parliament, and the chair and secretary of the EPP group in the European Parliament. If necessary, the Christian democrat opposition leaders were also invited. The summit replaced the "conference of party leaders and heads of government", which had been established in 1983. At the same time, the so-called Council was instituted, a body consisting of chairs and secretaries of the EPP and the member parties, as well as the Euro commissioners. These bodies would often convene on the same day, in preparation for European Council meetings, in order to align their points of view. Their main functions was coordinating diverging party positions and consensus-building, in order to be politically more effective.[38]

The supranational character of the EPP was somewhat reinforced in the 1990s, with majority voting procedures being used more frequently after 1992, according to its general secretary Jansen.[39] Nevertheless, consensus-building

continued to be a general pursuit. In this period, individual membership was introduced.[40] The EPP also undertook to involve the national parties more in European affairs in other ways. Participation in EPP congresses, for instance, which used to be restricted to the party elites of national member parties, was opened up to regional party organizations.

Pressurized by the strongly anti-socialist German Christian democrats, who were out to expand the EPP's position in the European political process, the EPP conducted a vigorous expansive strategy. In the 1990's, it admitted parties that could not be considered Christian democratic at all, such as the Spanish Partido Popular or the Italian Forza Italia. The British and Danish conservative MEPs closely cooperated with the EPP-group within the European Parliament. Those with strictly orthodox positions in the EPP, who had come out victorious in the 1970's, now tasted defeat. Membership of conservative parties had of course consequences for the identity and the programme of the EPP. As a consequence of its more conservative course, a merger with the conservative EDU was self-evident.[41] After the 1999 European elections they established a joint group. So as to appease the British Tories, the phrase "European Democrats" was added to the name of the EPP group. A few years later, the EDU merged into the EPP.

LIBERALS

In December 1993, the ELDR replaced the term 'federation' in its name for 'party' and was henceforth called the European Liberal, Democratic and Reform Party (ELDR).[42] Just before that, decision-making procedures had also been modified: instead of requiring qualified majorities, decisions could be taken with ordinary majorities. In principle, this meant that member parties relinquished some autonomy to the European party alliance. According to the Swedish political scientist Sandström, the new procedure was little used at first: "The newly created party would still use negotiations as the primary method of reaching common decisions, emphasizing the confederal composition of the ELDR".[43] Majority decision-making, however, would gradually be used more and more frequently, also on more politically sensitive issues, which, in a way, made the ELDR more supranational.[44] Others, like the former ELDR-secretary general Wijsenbeek, are critical. Individual membership, however, proved to be too high a hurdle, as a majority of member parties feared that this would imperil the national party organizations.

In the 1990's, the organizational structure of the ELDR was also modified. A new body was created between the congress and the board: the Council. This body, representing all member parties, convened more frequently than the congress. Owing to the increased competences of the European Parliament and the ELDR's wish to coordinate their member parties' positions prior to European Council meetings, mutual contacts under the ELDR banner greatly increased. Informal party leader consultations were formalized in 1995. These meetings were commonly attended by the liberal Euro commissioners and Ministers for Foreign Affairs. The relationship between the parliamentary group and the Europarty changed formally: the statutes specified that the group should represent the ELDR in the European Parliament, which somewhat restrained the autonomous position of the MEPs.

After the 1990's, finally, ties with the member parties were strengthened. The 'national' party secretaries met under the ELDR banner, representatives of the Europarty stepped up their visits to national party meetings, and national parliamentarians visited their groupin the European Parliament. The ELDR logo appeared increasingly on member party publications. In this period the debate about the introduction of individual membership also started, this may also be considered a means of improving national party grassroots involvement in the ELDR.

GREENS

Just like the other TNFs, the EGC also went through a reshuffle in the early 1990's to accommodate the Green parties that had sprung up in Eastern Europe. In June 1993 the EGC was reformed into the more tightly organized European Federation of Green Parties (EFGP). In contrast with its precursor, decisions in EFGP bodies were taken on a qualified majority basis. Nevertheless, its statutory wording allowed some leeway to the member parties. This led the German political scientist Dietz to conclude that the EFGP could not be considered a truly European party: "The point has not yet been reached when decisions taken by majority voting are truly accepted and executed by all member parties. Only in that way would their autonomy and their veto power be reduced".[45] EFGP membership was only open to parties, not to individuals.

Relations with the parliamentary group, which had improved after 1989, remained relatively good within the EFGP structure. For instance, it was decided to introduce an 'alarm-clock procedure', which enabled the party to call for

revision of established group points of view. However, the parliamentary group was not accountable to the EFGP. The separation of the group and the EFGP board hampered their mutual political harmonization. The EFGP's clout was also diminished by the lack of frequent party leader meetings.

REGIONALISTS

Unlike the other four Europarties, the member parties of the EFA did not participate in national governments and therefore could not influence the EU decision-making bodies (Council and Commission). As a consequence, the Alliance did not held convene party leaders conferences preceeding meetings of the European Council. In 2000, however, the EFA for the first time organized a conference for the leaders of the member parties and their ministers in regional executives.[46]

BALANCE

Partly as a consequence of the formal establishment of "political parties at the European level" in the Treaty of Maastricht, the Europarties became more self-confident. This was reflected symbolically in the fact that most began calling themselves 'parties' rather than 'federations'. Their increased self-assurance was also expressed in a more pronounced political stance. Instead of focusing primarily on framing programmes and mobilizing the electorate, as they had done since 1979, the Europarties began concentrating in the 1990's on policy formulation and on influencing the political agenda of the European Union.

This shift in emphasis prompted adaptations to the organizational structure of the three largest Europarties. The most important reform was the institutionalization of meetings between national party leaders (frequently also heads of government in the case of the EPP and PES) and their most prominent allies within the European Union in the early 1990's. The purpose of this body was to arrive through consultation at a joint position for heads of government in the European Council, in order to expand its political influence.[47] The creation of this forum, however, led to a degree of centralization and reduced accountability within the Europarties. This was because party leaders were not statutorily accountable to the Congress, the highest body of the Europarties, but at most to their own party congress.

The need for greater harmonization and coordination also played a role in the

introduction of the Council, which convened more frequently than the congress. As the political function of the Europarties became stronger, their organization became increasingly complex, which was also reflected in a greater number of working groups, whose task it was to prepare some aspects of their political and policy positions.[48]

For most Europarties the transition – at least nominally – from federation to party meant adjusting their internal decision-making processes. Those who had not done so yet, also introduced the majority vote principle into their internal decision-making processes. In this way, they arrived at the supranational integration stage distinguished by Niedermayer, at least in theory. However, the practice was not truly supranational, at least outside the EPP, because not only the search for consensus tended to remain the guiding principle of the Europarties, but also because member parties usually had the formal option of withdrawing from a majority decision.The actual, effective transfer of sovereignty from member parties to the transnational level thus remained limited, also because party leader meetings do not take decisions on a majority basis.

After asserting themselves more in the European political arena, the most important Europarties in any event sought to strengthen their ties with their rank and file – the national member parties – and to raise their profile among party members. From the end of the 1990's they focused specifically on member parties, including below the level of the national party elite. The EPP, for example, sought to increase the involvement of regional party organizations in its activities, while the PES tried to ensure that national delegations were not appointed (exclusively) by the party leadership, but were (also) elected by the party congresses. A logical sequel would have been to introduce individual membership, but for many that was a step too far.

Europarties thus evolved in the late 1990's into organizations with a more pronounced political stance and more functions. They no longer focused solely on drawing up election programmes and – to a lesser degree – mobilizing voters, but also on influencing EU decision-making. And they became increasingly involved in common policy-making. Thanks to the more co-ordinated activities of party leaders, the Europarties were able to seize somewhat more of the initiative in their relationship with the Eurogroups. However, their position always remained secondary, partly because the relationship of material dependence on the Eurogroups in terms of office space, staff and funding remained unchanged. The introduction of the party statute in 2003 would put an end to this.

IV. Party Statute (2003)

The Europarties were most disappointed that recognition in the Treaty of Maastricht did not extend to financial support. In order to properly carry out their tasks in the European political process (to which the Treaty of Maastricht alluded), it was entirely logical that the Europarties should be given funding – certainly bearing in mind the increasing costs due to the geographical scale on which they were expected to operate. However, despite discussions on this matter, the Treaty of Amsterdam, concluded in October 1997, brought no changes. In 2000 the leaders of the five largest Europarties urged the drawing up of a party statute containing a financial regulation. This was prompted in part by growing criticism of the way in which the large Europarties in particular were supported financially and in other ways by their Eurogroups.[49] In 2000 five to ten percent of the 35 million euros in EU funding received by the groups went to the Europarties. The European Parliament itself also pressed for regulations to promote financial transparency.

The Treaty of Nice, concluded in 2001 and coming into effect in 2003, announced a statute of political parties at European level. Article 191 reiterated the words of the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties but added the following: "The Council... shall lay down the regulations governing political parties at European level and in particular the rules regarding their funding".[50] It was not until November 2003 – so half a year before the European elections of June 2004 – that the European Parliament and the European Commission established "the regulations governing political parties and rules regarding their funding at European level".[51] Europarties wishing to be eligible for EU funding needed to at least have legal personality, and have participated in elections to the European Parliament (or have expressed the intention to do so). Moreover, they had to be represented in supra-local parliamentary bodies in at least a quarter of the member states, or to have gained in at least a quarter of the member states no less than three percent of the votes cast in each of those states during the most recent elections for the European Parliament. Their programmes and actions had to respect the fundamental principles of the European Union ("freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as the constitutional state"). They were obliged to provide a statement of all donations above EUR 500 and were not permitted to receive anonymous donations, monies from companies on which the government could exert influence, or sums of

more than EUR 12,000. EU funding could only be spent on "administrative expenses, expenses associated with logistical support, meetings, research, cross-border events, studies, communications and publications".

The party statute had a major impact on the Europarties, in particular because of the explicit stipulation that "donations from the budgets of political groups in the European Parliament" were no longer permitted. Because the Europarties could also claim funding from the European Parliament, they now became more autonomous – in a financial sense at least – although in terms of resources they still lagged much behind the Eurogroups. At the same time, the statute regulated the financial relationship between the Europarties and the member parties. It was stated that the former should not use the granted funding "to fund, either directly or indirectly, political parties at national level".

The decision to switch to funding political parties (a total of EUR 10.6 million euro in 2008) had major implications for the European party system. The fact that the EFGP renamed itself the European Green Party (EGP) was a relatively minor change. More far-reaching was the creation of several new Europarties.[52] In addition to the five discussed in this article, these were predominantly eurosceptic and eurocritical groups, such as the Party of the European Left (comprising left-socialist, and present and former communist parties), the Alliance of Independent Democrats in Europe, the EUDemocrats, and the Alliance for Europe of the Nations. The European Democratic Party was the only new Europarty to embrace European integration. This increase ment greater opportunities at the European level for the expression of the political will of citizens.

The funding regulation thus created its own dynamic, not only with regard to the number of beneficiaries, but also in relation to newly funded organizations. In December 2007 "European political foundations" became eligible for financial support (amounting to about 5 million euros). They have to promote debate about Europe and to involve citizens in this dialogue, and are expected to play their part in boosting the representative role of the Europarties. All large Europarties quickly set up a foundation, which usually took the form of a network of member party think tanks. The foundations assist the Europarties with underpinning and developing policy, which might theoretically improve their position vis à vis the Eurogroups.

During this period the Europarties pressed ahead with their efforts – outside the campaigns for the European elections – to raise their profile among

their supporters within member parties and beyond. The ELDR introduced individual membership (but was not able to translate it into practice); the EGP registered those who were interested as 'supporters' (which some 1.300 did). Some Europarties organized campaigns in between elections to reach a broader audience. In 2005 the PES launched the 'Social Europe Initiative', intended as a dialogue between politicians and voters. The Greens began a campaign in the European Union against climate change, using the same slogans and posters in different countries. The EFA also ran a campaign in several countries under the same slogan. In doing so, the Europarties not only drew their existence to the attention of a wider audience, but also further shaped their own identities. Publications on individual party histories worked to this same end.[53]

V. Evaluation

Since the end of the 1970's the principal functions of the Europarties have been the articulation and aggregation of voter preferences in the first place, and to a lesser extent the mobilization of voters. New tasks have been added over time. In the 1990's greater emphasis was given to formulating common policy, agenda-setting and actively influencing in a co-ordinated way the outcomes of the European Council. More recently, there have been attempts to broaden public support by integrating subnational units of member parties and individual citizens within the organizational context of the Europarties.

Although Europarties have acquired a broader range of representative roles, in general they have achieved only limited success in carrying out these tasks. This does not concern so much their bigger focus on processes of common policy-making. Here, Europarties have succeeded somewhat in raising their political profile and improving their ability to set agendas. The advent of affiliated political foundations might reinforce this trend. The Europarties have also proved effective at co-ordinating the views of party and government leaders to enable them to influence the decision-making processes of the European Council.

As opposed to these relative successes, the Europarties' role of mobilizing voters has left much to be desired. The average turnout in the European elections was 63% in 1979, falling continuously to less than 46% in 2004. Opinion polls show that elections have by no means narrowed the gap between the European Union and the European public. Various things can also be said about the articulation and aggregation roles. Although the large Europarties have

at least drawn up election programmes for each election, these are viewed by many as exceedingly vague. What is more, the fact that many member parties also produce their own manifestos as a matter of course has damaged the status of the joint programmes.

Before we will answer the question how these ambivalent results can be explained, we will first sum up the organizational development of Europarties in the past thirty years. Here we can detect a clear trend. Europarties have progressed beyond the stage of contact and co-operation on Niedermayer's scale. Almost all have begun calling themselves 'parties' in the wake of the Treaty of Maastricht, although this doesn't mean that they have become fully-fledged and fully integrated party organizations in Niedermayer's sense, which entails among other things individual membership and internal decision-making in accordance with the principle of majority voting. While the principle has formally been introduced in most Europarties, this has usually amounted to very little in practice, except perhaps for the EPP. When real issues are at stake, seeking consensus is often still the norm, for the simple reason that member parties do not wish to abandon their influence on essential matters in favour of a supranational body that can overrule them. Member parties are also reticent about individual membership. They are afraid it will promote the supranational structure of the Europarties and undermine their pivotal national role within these organisations.

"Genuinely integrated European parties would require a further transfer of 'sovereignty' from national parties", according to Johansson, and that's just what member parties are afraid of.[54] Member parties are willing to use the Europarties and let them carry out certain tasks at the European leven when they expect to benefit from it. Examples are the establishment of Eurogroups in the European Parliament (without them the national parties would not have much influence at all) and the meetings of party leaders which exercize influence on the agenda of the European Council. The institutionalization of these meetings was regarded as a sign of revitalization of the Europarties, but in practice they are hardly more than intergovernmental meetings between national party leaders which are not accountable to any federal body.[55]

A larger intermediary role for the Europarties in the linkage-process between citizens and political elite of the Union might be more difficult to swallow by the member parties as it would weaken their own position. The individual membership of the Europarties, insofar as it exists at all, does not mean much

as long as these members have no voting rights. Also at the European elections the Europarties play a very modest part. It is paradoxical that they were set up with an eye to direct European elections, but that national member parties have then gone on to virtually dominate the European electoral process up till now. After all, they recruit the parliamentary candidates, relatively often draw up their own election programmes and force the election campaigns into a national context. This 'nationalisation' leads to a distortion of the representative mechanism: the MEP's represent the electorate in the European political arena on the basis of nationally determined voter preferences.

This problem could be at least partly solved by granting Europarties, after thirty years, a more central procedural position within the European electoral process. This can be achieved fairly simply by having a portion of the MEP's elected by means of transnational, Union-wide candidate lists drawn up by the Europarties. This would strengthen the Europarties' positions in that they themselves would also have to draw up candidate lists – thus also strengthening their position vis à vis the MEPs. The Europarties themselves would conduct campaigns in all member states on European issues, which should also give more meaning to their European election programmes. Thus the election contest would acquire a stronger European character, certainly if it was also personalized by having the European Parliament nominate and appoint the chair of the European Commission after the elections. The Europarties would benefit from this, since they would have to put forward candidates for this position, which would give them also the opportunity to engage citizens or individual members in the nomination process. All in all, the link between the European electorate and the European institutions would be reinforced.

2. Conclusion

Clearly, the Europarties are not yet able to articulate the political will of the citizens very well, as demanded by the Treaty of Maastricht and also the Treaty of Lisbon. The question is whether they are to blame for this themselves. Obviously, the political system of the European Union is very different from a national political system. As the Italian political scientist Bardi put it: 'even if, for analytical purposes, we consider the EC a fully autonomous political system, then the most important institutional condition for political party development, the centrality of parliament, does not pertain'. After all, there is no Euro-

pean government dependent on a majority in the European Parliament. As a consequence, the power of a Europarty is still rather limited.

The future of the Europarties depends on the possibility of fulfilling their intermediary and representative function in a more substantial way. Here they depend on the national parties, directly and indirectly. Indirectly: the national parties determine the direction of European integration through their representatives in various European institutions, which in turns determines the development of the Europarty. The institutional innovations mentioned earlier (pan-European lists, election of the chair of the European Commission) could improve the representative function of the Europarty.

At the same time, the member parties can exercize direct influence on the structure of the Europarty. 'National parties remain the "gatekeepers" on transnational party activity', in the words of the British political scientist Ladrech.[56] Europarties depend on their goodwill – which was so far rather modest. The Europarties lack real independent authority as well as sufficient resources. Combined with the institutional peculiarities of the European political system, this explains the curious structure of the Europarty: a decentralized network-like co-ordinating organisation, which allows horizontal contacts between MEPs, European Commissioners and government leaders in the European Council as well as vertical contacts between those people and the national party elites.[57] In other words, Europarties facilitate rather than represent – and this will last as long as the member parties want this.

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